

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6097

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 0393

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, CS

SUBJECT: FORTY EIGHT HOURS TO ELECTION DAY

REF: SAN JOSE 0297

SAN JOSE 0394

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: WE ESTIMATE THAT DANIEL ODUBER, THE CANDIDATE OF THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT PARTY HAS A 3 TO 1 CHANCE TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY ON THE FIRST BALLOT ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3. DESPITE A FAST FINISH BY THIRD-RUNNING RODRIGO CARAZO, ODUBER IS EXPECTED TO SLIGHTLY EXCEED THE 40 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE REQUIRED. VOTING WILL CONCLUDE AT 5 P.M., SUNDAY. THE WINNER IS EXPECTED TO BE KNOWN BY 1 A.M., FEBRUARY 4. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH TWO DAYS TO GO BEFORE THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, THE COUNTRY'S MOOD IS TENSE BUT NOT UGLY. THE CAMPAIGN HAS HEATED UP BUT THE ATMOSPHERE REMAINS FESTIVE. THE SHARPEST LAST-MINUTE ATTACKS HAVE BEEN MOSTLY BETWEEN FRONT-RUNNING DANIEL ODUBER OF THE PARTIDO LIBERACION NACIONAL (PLN) AND THE FAST-ADVANCING THIRD-PLACE CANDIDATE, THE PARTIDO RENOVACION DEMOCRATICA

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(PRD) CANDIDATE, RODRIGO CARAZO. CURIOUSLY, THE SECOND-

RUNNING FERNANDO TREJOS ESCALANTE, CANDIDATE OF THE MAJOR ANTI-PLN OPPOSITION PARTY, UNIFICACION NACIONAL (UN), HAS STILL NOT PICKED UP THE CAMPAIGN TEMPO EVEN THOUGH HIS STRATEGISTS HAVE ADVISED HIM THAT HE HAS FALLEN STEADILY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. THE FOURTH MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, JORGE GONZALEZ MARTEN OF THE PARTIDO NACIONAL INDEPENDIENTE (PNI), HELD A SPECTACULAR RALLY IN SAN JOSE ON JANUARY 25TH OF BETWEEN 20,000 AND 25,000 PEOPLE BROUGHT IN FROM ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. THE RALLY SERVED TO RE-ESTABLISH PNI CONFIDENCE WHICH HAD BEEN SUFFERING AND PROBABLY HALTED A MILD PNI DETERIORATION.

3. ODUBER'S CONCERN WITH CARAZO'S STEADY GAINS (REPORTED REFTTEL) BECAME CLEAR THIS WEEK AS THE PLN SHIFTED ITS PROPAGANDA GUNS FROM TREJOS TO CARAZO. AN OUTSIDE OBSERVER, UNFAMILIAR WITH THE POLITICAL SCENE, WOULD HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THIRD-RUNNING CARAZO NOT TREJOS WAS ODUBER'S MAIN CONTENDER. IN FACT, PLN STRATEGISTS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT CARAZO'S GROWTH IS ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN ODUBER REACHING THE REQUIRED 40-PERCENT PLURALITY REQUIRED TO WIN ON THE FIRST BALLOT. THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT CARAZO, IN ADDITION TO BENEFITTING FROM VOTES LOST BY THE OTHER OPPOSITION CANDIDATES, IS NOW BORING IN DANGEROUSLY ON TRADITIONAL PLN VOTES. THEY ARE FEARFUL THAT THE BANDWAGON PSYCHOLOGY PROVIDING CARAZO WITH HIS UPWARD MOMENTUM COULD INCREASE DRAMATICALLY OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS AND ARE PUTTING ALL THEIR EFFORTS INTO STOPPING HIM. IN SPEECH AFTER SPEECH, PLN CANDIDATES AT ALL LEVELS ARE ATTACKING FORMER LIBERACIONISTA CARAZO'S BETRAYAL OF THE PARTY AND APPEALING TO THE PLN FAITHFUL TO VOTE FOR ODUBER OUT OF LOYALTY TO THE PARTY IF NOT FOR ODUBER THE PERSON. CARAZO WILL KEEP UP THE PRESSURE ON ODUBER UNTIL THE END. HE HAS AGAIN CHALLENGED ODUBER TO A TV DEBATE AT NOON ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY, THIS TIME AS A CONDITION TO ACCEPTING A PLN BET THAT ODUBER WILL WIN ON THE FIRST BALLOT. DURING THE PAST FEW DAYS, CARAZO HAS TURNED PART OF HIS ATTACK AGAINST TREJOS AS HE SEEMS TO SENSE THE POSSIBILITY OF RUNNING SECOND.

4. IN ADDITION TO CARAZO, MINOR CANDIDATE G.W. VILLALOBOS
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HAS BEGUN TO CAUSE THE PLN SOME SERIOUS CONCERN. VILLALOBOS HAS BEEN THE COLOR INGREDIENT IN THIS OTHERWISE LACKLUSTER CAMPAIGN AND IS CONSIDERED BY MANY TO BE WORTH AT LEAST 15,000 VOTES AND PERHAPS AS HIGH AS 30,000 VOTES ON ELECTION DAY. PLN STRATEGISTS CALCULATE THAT VILLALOBOS WILL ATTRACT MANY VOTERS WHO OTHERWISE WOULD HAVE ABSTAINED, THUS INCREASING THE TOTAL VOTER TURNOUT AND MAKING THE MAGIC 40 PERCENT FOR ODUBER THAT MUCH HARDER

TO ACHIEVE.

5. A SURPRISING NUMBER OF SEASONED POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT A SECOND ELECTION IS INEVITABLE, ALTHOUGH THEY CONCEDE ODUBER A STRONG PLURALITY. WE ESTIMATE THAT ODUBER WILL WIN THE PRESIDENCY ON THE FIRST BALLOT BY 3-TO-10 ODDS, MOSTLY BECAUSE OF THE OVERWHELMING STRENGTH OF THE PLN MACHINE AND THE COLONES 6 MILLION BUDGET THE PLN HAS SET ASIDE TO GET OUT THE VOTE ON ELECTION DAY. WHILE THE UN MACHINE IS REASONABLY WELL ORGANIZED, IT CANNOT APPROACH THE PLN IN FINANCIAL RESERVES.

6. AS SUGGESTED, THE EMBASSY EXPECTS ODUBER TO REACH THE REQUIRED 40 PERCENT BUT BY A SLIM MARGIN. ODUBER'S HEALTHY PLURALITY OVER FADING RUNNER-UP FERNANDO TREJOS ESCALANTE IS ASSURED WITH FAST-CLOSING RODRIGO CARAZO'S WEAKNESS IN RURAL AREAS EXPECTED TO KEEP HIM FROM FATALLY DAMAGING ODUBER'S MARGIN ABOVE 40 PERCENT. BARRING UNPREDICTABLE DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN NOW AND SUNDAY MORNING WE SEE THE ELECTION OUTCOME ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES:

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE/PARTY	PCNT OF VOTE
1. DANIEL ODUBER, NATIONAL LIBERATION (PLN)	39-43
2. FERNANDO TREJOS ESCALANTE, NATIONAL UNIFICATION (UN)	27-30
3. RODRIGO CARAZO, DEMOCRATIC RE AVATION (PRD)	14-17
4. JORGE GONZALEZ MARTEN, NATIONAL INDEPENDENT (PNI)	9-12
5. MANUEL MORA VALVERDE, SOCIALIST ACTION (PASO)	3-5
6. G. W. VILLALOBOS, DEMOCRATIC (PD)	2-3
7. JORGE MONGE ZAMORA, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT (PDC)	1-2
8. J. F. AGUILAR BULGARELLI, SOCIALIST (PS)	0-1

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THE RETURNS WILL BEGIN TO COME IN TO THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL AT 8 P.M., FEBRUARY 3. BY MIDNIGHT OR 1:00 A.M. THE WINNER WILL PROBABLY BE PREDICTABLE. THE EMBASSY EXPECTS TO REPORT EARLY RESULTS AND HOPEFULLY THE WINNER BY OPENING OF BUSINESS, FEBRUARY 4.
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